



Understanding tourism in social farming as a form of social innovation

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Abstract

Tourism in social farming contexts has important implications for the inclusive development of rural areas. However, current literature on the topic is still scarce and many organizational aspects of this activity are still unexplored. To provide a systematic understanding of the phenomenon, this study presents a literature review to identify tourism in social farming as a form of social innovation. The results of this research reveal how tourism in social farming responds to specific societal challenges, how it fosters social actors' agency and which kind of relationships it stimulates among them. In the end, a comprehensive framework is proposed. Conclusions will detail the theoretical and practical implications of this study while leaving room for reflection on future research.

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Introduction

Creating inclusive societies requires more socially innovative practices (Howaldt *et al.*, 2015, 2021), whose potential is particularly acknowledged for the sustainable development of rural areas (European Commission, 2021). Among the rural socially innovative activities there is social farming (Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014), which uses agricultural resources to promote services for local communities and the most vulnerable people (Di Iacovo & O'Connor, 2009; Di Iacovo, 2020; Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014). Recent studies highlighted its potential for the development of a sustainable tourism offer, having positive impacts on both the well-being of end-users and the entire rural territories (Calabrò *et al.*, 2022; Ferrara *et al.*, 2023; Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2021): indeed, besides fostering rural accessibility (Calabrò *et al.*, 2022), tourism in social farming can foster inclusive economic growth (Ferrara *et al.*, 2023; Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2021) since it creates the conditions for “a fair distribution of benefits, enhance job creation, protect natural and cultural resources and empower the traditionally marginalized groups” (World Tourism Organization, 2020, p. 5). But “What drives the development of such activity? And what does this generate for and in rural communities?” are questions that research must explore to understand and support such practices.

To this aim, the present study systematizes the scientific literature to frame tourism in social farming as a form of rural social innovation. Therefore, the next section will offer an overview of the features of social innovation and its contribution to sustainable rural tourism development, while social farming will be presented as a specific case of investigation. Afterwards, an overview of the methodology to conduct the literature review will be provided and the results will be reported. Lastly, some conclusions will be drawn by detailing the theoretical and practical implications of this study, while leaving room for reflection on future research.

1. Social innovation: features and contributions to sustainable rural tourism development

Social innovation (SI) is a process of social transformation born to solve socially relevant issues (Howaldt *et al.*, 2015, 2021). Unlike the Schumpeterian concept of innovation which results in new technology, SI is characterised by a strong community-centred nature, which influences the entire process of change (Howaldt *et al.*, 2015, 2021; Murray *et al.*, 2010). The innovative trait of the resulting ideas, products, services, or models is not exclusively novel but can be a re-application of solutions tested in other domains (Murray *et al.*, 2010). Thanks to the marketability of its results, SI is a vehicle for

territorial development, as it becomes a stepping stone for new employment opportunities (European Commission, s.d.; OECD, s.d.). For this reason, socially innovative initiatives are crucial for the liveability of rural areas, as they allow to counteract the lack of services and infrastructures and the consequent outmigration hindering the development of these territories (European Commission, 2021). Although there is no general agreement on the definition of SI, there are three interconnected elements characterizing the phenomenon:

1. a pressing social challenge, which is the object of mobilisation by social actors (European Commission, s.d.; Murray *et al.*, 2010; OECD, s.d.), and the starting point for the development of more inclusive and sustainable societies (Howaldt *et al.*, 2015, 2021);
2. the social agency, is to say the social actors' capacity for (re)action to contextual issues. Several stakeholders can be involved in this process (Terstriep *et al.*, 2020): civil society, governments, research institutions, and companies (Murray *et al.*, 2010; Terstriep *et al.*, 2020), including also the intervention of actors from the social economy, like NGOs and social entrepreneurs (OECD, s.d.);
3. a new asset of relations and collaborations. Indeed, the effectiveness of socially innovative solutions depends on the reorganization of social relations which also determines the overall impact of SI itself (Terstriep *et al.*, 2020).

The role of SI is particularly acknowledged in the current debate on sustainable tourism (Booyens, 2022). Indeed, tourism becomes socially profitable and sustainable in the long run when it helps mitigate local challenges, thus generating a positive impact on the socio-economic development of populations (Booyens, 2022). Therefore, social inclusion and community participation in decision-making are key aspects of making tourism an inclusively prosperous resource (Aquino *et al.*, 2018; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). In this sense, the contribution of SI is to facilitate the emergence of bottom-up practices that use tourism to achieve a societal mission (Booyens, 2022).

1.1. Integrating social farming in the discourse of sustainable tourism

According to Di Iacovo *et al.* (2014), social farming (SF) is a form of SI addressing the lack of services in marginal territories, by creating a multi-stakeholder co-creation arena to define cross-sectoral activities between agricultural and health services for the well-being of rural communities and most fragile people (e.g., children, elderly, prisoners, people undergoing drug or alcohol rehabilitation, or with physical or mental disabilities).

Recreational activities within SF represent a space for social change (Amsden & McEntee, 2011), since they allow visitors to experience meaningful

reflective activities in connection with local food and communities (Farmer, 2012; Wojcieszak, 2018; Mair *et al.*, 2008; Amsden & McEntee, 2011; Sumner & Mair, 2020), while enhancing the social value of the agricultural landscape and promote a new role for the farmer in the rural socio-economic system, driven by the principles of ethics and sustainability (Lanfranchi & Giannetto, 2014; Wojcieszak, 2018). More recently scholars emphasised that the provision of a tourism offer in SF can generate positive impacts on rural accessibility and its inclusive economic development (Calabrò *et al.*, 2022; Ferrara *et al.*, 2023; Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2021). This allows us to consider SF as a socially innovative space for sustainable rural tourism development (Booyens, 2022). But what are the socially innovative features of tourism in SF? That is to say:

RQ1. What social challenges does tourism in SF respond to?

RQ2. In which terms does it enhance social actors' agency?

RQ3. Which social relations or collaborations does it create?

An overview of the questions addressed by the present study is provided in the following Figure 1:

Figure 1 - An overview of the research questions addressed by this study



2. Materials and methods

To highlight the socially innovative nature of tourism in SF, this study uses a systematic literature review (SLR), for gaining evidence-informed knowledge about the phenomenon (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, the research applies the protocol provided by Tranfield *et al.* (2003), by adapting its steps as shown in Table 1:

Table 1 - An overview on the different steps to conduct the SLR (adapted from Tranfield et al., 2003)

SLR steps	Step	Objective(s)	Activities	Tool(s)/ Method	Results
Phase 0 – identification of the need for a review	<i>Identification of the research question(s)</i>	Definition of the main research questions leading the study	Review of the meaning of SF as a form of SI (Di Iacovo <i>et al.</i> , 2014) and of the potential that tourism in SF (Ferrara <i>et al.</i> , 2023; Calabrò <i>et al.</i> , 2022) can have as SI (Booyen, 2022)	Bibliographic research	Main research question: in which terms does tourism in SF constitute a form of SI?
		Definition of the specific research questions leading the study	Review on meaning and characteristics of SI	Bibliographic research	RQ1: Which societal challenges does tourism in SF face? RQ2: In which terms does tourism in SF enhance society's capacity to act? QR3: Which social relations/ collaborations does tourism in SF create?
Phase 1 – Preparation of a proposal for a review	<i>Identification of the protocol for SLR</i>	Identification of a useful protocol to follow for SLR	Basic review of SLR protocols	Bibliographic research	Evidence-informed knowledge from scientific literature as provided by Tranfield <i>et al.</i> (2003)
Phase 2 – Development of a review protocol					
Phase 3 – Identification of research	<i>Identifying relevant literature on the topics and relevant search tools</i>	Defining the field of investigation	Review of the meanings and dimensions of social farming	Bibliographic research	Ferrara <i>et al.</i> , 2023; Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2021; Calabrò <i>et al.</i> , 2022; Di Iacovo <i>et al.</i> , 2014

Table 1 - continued

SLR steps	Step	Objective(s)	Activities	Tool(s)/ Method	Results
		Developing search strings	Selection of search terms able to encompass the research topics	Use of the boolean terms “and” and “or” to compose the search strings	SF related terminology: “green car*”, “social farm*”, “farm animal-assisted intervention”, “therapeutic garden*”, “therapeutic horticultur*”, “nature-based rehabilitat*”, “care farm*” (García-Llorente <i>et al.</i> , 2018)
		Identifying search databases	Electronic databases	Scopus; Web of Science	–
	<i>Identification of inclusion/exclusion criteria</i>	Defining inclusion and exclusion criteria	Establishing a set of exclusion criteria	Bibliographic research	García-Llorente <i>et al.</i> (2018)
	<i>Carrying out the research</i>	Initial search and screening	Search on databases according to Scopus and Web of Sciences search criterion “titles, abstracts or keywords”	Scopus; Web of Sciences	28 documents found
			Preliminary screening and selection (elimination of duplicates)	Manual	9 duplicates eliminated

Table 1 - continued

SLR steps	Step	Objective(s)	Activities	Tool(s)/ Method	Results
Phase 4 – Selection of the studies Phase 5 – Study quality assessment	<i>Study assessment and selection</i>	Study screening	Preliminary screening and selection (application of exclusion criteria)	Manual	12 studies eliminated from the initial search
			Selection of studies included in the review	Manual	Chen <i>et al.</i> (2020); Chin <i>et al.</i> (2021); Gramm <i>et al.</i> (2019); Lanfranchi & Giannetto (2014); Moriggi (2020); Moriggi <i>et al.</i> (2020); Kmita-Dziasek (2017)
		Second phase of search and screening	Backward and forward snowballing across the selected studies	Manual	Chiara <i>et al.</i> (2019); Di Iacovo <i>et al.</i> (2014); Fazzi (2011); Forleo & Palmieri (2019); Knapik (2018); Knapik (2020); Lanfranchi <i>et al.</i> (2015); Moruzzo <i>et al.</i> (2020); Nicolosi <i>et al.</i> (2021); Tulla <i>et al.</i> (2014)
Phase 6 – Data extraction and monitoring process	<i>Data extraction</i>	Extraction of information relevant to answer the research question	Data extracted about: 1. Forms of tourism developed in SF contexts; 2. Data related to RQ1, RQ2, RQ3	Manual	Forms of tourism developed in SF context; Useful text related to RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
Phase 7 – Data synthesis	<i>Data analysis</i>	Clustering	Clustering of the information reported in the studies	Manual	Clustered information related to RQ1; RQ2; RQ3

Table 1 - continued

SLR steps	Step	Objective(s)	Activities	Tool(s)/ Method	Results
		Analysis	Meta-analysis (qualitative coding analysis) of the information reported in selected studies	Manual	Qualitative meta-analysis of clustered information related to RQ1; RQ2; RQ3
Phase 8 – Report and recommendations	–	Summary	Summary of results and conclusions	Manual	Summary of results and conclusions
Phase 9 – Getting evidence into practice	Not applicable				

After defining the topic and the research questions, relevant literature has been scoped to reveal the keywords to be used in the search: the review by García-Llorente *et al.* (2018) revealed the terminologies associated with SF, which have been addressed to relevant tourism-related terms used in the World Tourism Organization (2020) report on sustainable rural tourism development. Next, Web of Science and Scopus databases were used to get access to the articles according to their titles, abstracts or keywords containing at least one of the search terms for each string. By linking the strings with the Boolean operator “AND”, the research returned 28 studies (15 from Web of Science and 13 from Scopus). After removing duplicates (9 studies), the research applied inclusion and exclusion criteria as displayed in Table 2:

Table 2 - Inclusion-exclusion criteria to select studies for this review

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Research field	All	–
Date	>2000	All previous
Language	English	All others
Study type	Empirical and theoretical. All types of peer reviewed journals. Books chapters.	All others
Geography	All	–
Relevance	(i)Addresses tourism in social farming discourse	(i) Addresses tourism and social farming separately (e.g., studies referring to diversification strategies, etc.)
	(ii)Level of analysis: does it contribute to the understanding of tourism in social farming knowledge and development?	(ii) All studies not allowing to contextualize tourism in social farming

Selected studies have been published since the year 2000 (García-Llorente *et al.*, 2018). Only peer-reviewed papers and book chapters published in English have been considered. At this stage, many studies treating tourism and SF separately emerged. Selection choice shrinks to those treating tourism as a key element in SF, to allow contextualising reasons and dynamics of the phenomenon. Due to the low number of results matching the criteria (7 among articles and 1 book chapter), backwards and forward snowballing among the articles (Greenhalgh & Peacock, 2005) was implemented. To do so, guidelines from Wohlin (2014) were followed and 10 new contributions were added, after being revised.

Data collected were synthesised and clustered into RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3 through the means of qualitative meta-analysis (Levitt, 2018), which allows considering information proceeding from independent studies and applying a thematic analysis to reveal the attributes and reasons of phenomena (Gibbs, 2007; Levitt, 2018; Saldaña, 2013). An overview is provided in Annex B.

3. Results

Research includes nineteen scientific articles and one book chapter (Kmita-Dziasek, 2017), distributed over ten years (2011 to 2021) and reported from both European and non-European countries (Chen *et al.*, 2021; Chin & Pehin Dato Musa, 2021), while most of the literature originates from Italy (Chiara *et al.*, 2019; Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014; Fazzi, 2011; Ferrara *et al.*, 2023; Forleo & Palmieri, 2019; Gramm *et al.*, 2019; Lanfranchi & Giannetto, 2014; Moruzzo *et al.*, 2020; Nicolosi *et al.*, 2021).

3.1. *Tourism in social farming: forms and aims*

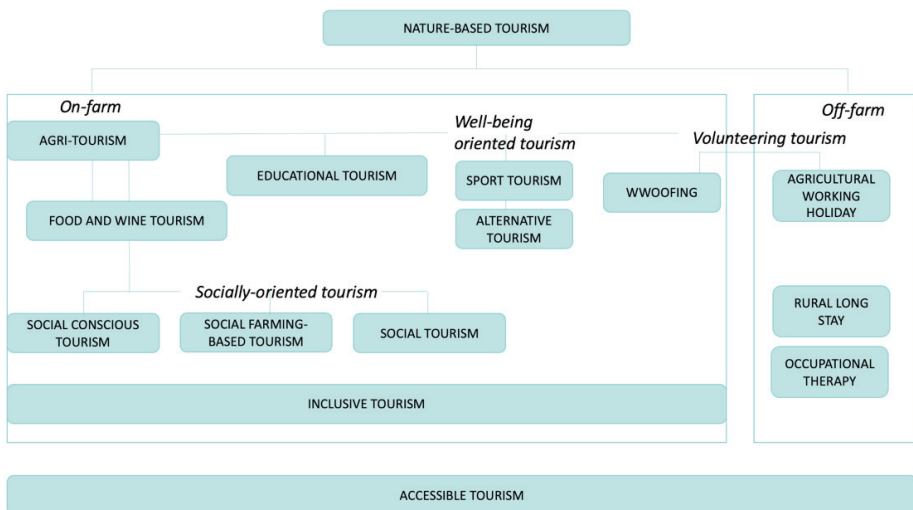
Literature on SF addresses tourism through different terminologies, like nature-based (Moriggi, 2020), inclusive (Ferrara *et al.*, 2023) and accessible tourism (Calabrò *et al.*, 2022). Often, it highlights *on-farm activities*, as the case of agri-tourism (Chiara *et al.*, 2019; Chin & Pehin Dato Musa, 2021; Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014; Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2021; Knapik, 2020; Moruzzo *et al.*, 2020; Nicolosi *et al.*, 2021), food and wine-based (Lanfranchi & Giannetto, 2014) and educational tourism (Forleo & Palmieri, 2019; Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2021) but also *well-being oriented activities* such as sports (Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2021) and alternative tourism (Chiara *et al.*, 2019) or *volunteering* as WWOOFing (Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2021) and agricultural working holidays (Chen *et al.*, 2021). Specific terminologies related to *socially-oriented tourism* are also mentioned, both related to on-farm activities as the case of socially conscious agri-tourism (Tulla *et al.*, 2014), social farming-based tourism (Kmita-Dziasek, 2017), or social tourism (Nicolosi *et al.*, 2021) and *off-farm services*, as rural long-stay tourism and occupational therapy (Chen *et al.*, 2021). Annex A provides an overview of the tourism forms and aims associated with SF.

Overall, “nature-based tourism” (Moriggi, 2020) serves as an umbrella term since it focuses on the core resource of SF projects. However, the term is used in the context of northern European countries, where natural resources are prominent and allow for immersive off-farm activities. Instead, when recreational services are developed on farm, they become an expression of the multi-functional nature of agriculture and the farm itself (Chiara *et al.*, 2019; Chin & Pehin Dato Musa, 2021; Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014; Ferrara *et al.*, 2023; Forleo & Palmieri, 2019; Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2021; Gramm *et al.*, 2019; Kmita-Dziasek, 2017; Knapik, 2020; Lanfranchi & Giannetto, 2014; Moruzzo *et al.*, 2020; Nicolosi *et al.*, 2021; Tulla *et al.*, 2014). Indeed, “agritourism” refers both to “the act of involving visitors to a (social) farm” (Chiara *et al.*, 2019, p.533) and the set of (agritourism) resources “partially unused during the year” (Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014, p.330) which can be employed for social activities (Di Iacovo

et al., 2014; Knapik, 2020). On-farm tourism becomes a source of farm income diversification (Ferrara et al., 2023; Forleo & Palmieri, 2019; Gramm et al., 2019; Kmita-Dziasek, 2017; Knapik, 2018, 2020). In this case, activities develop through the use of farm products for culinary (as in the case of “food and wine tourism” (Lanfranchi & Giannetto (2014)), or educational offers (Forleo & Palmieri, 2019; Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2021; Gramm et al., 2019). Natural areas constitute a perfect environment for disseminating cultural and societal values (Ferrara et al., 2023; Forleo & Palmieri, 2019; Gramm et al., 2019; Moriggi et al., 2020), thus favouring people’s learning and personal growth (Ferrara et al., 2023; Kmita-Dziasek, 2017). The educational aspect also drives the activities aimed at improving dietary and healthy lifestyles (Chiara et al., 2019; Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2021), or the discovery of techniques for sustainable agriculture, as in the case of WWOOFing (Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2021).

Moreover, according to Lanfranchi et al. (2015), the “social” activities address mostly marginalized people, not only as beneficiaries of a tourism offer based on specific needs but also as a legitimate tourism workforce (Ferrara et al., 2023). The benefits provided by the individual “inclusive farms” can be extended if the recreational offer is organized as a system, based on a network between public and other private actors (Ferrara et al., 2023). This is the case of the experience provided by Knapik (2018) who encourages the development of an ‘educational social farm’ system, or the one provided by Chen et al. (2021) related to a long-term care plan encompassing different tourism activities for seniors. A visual overview of forms and categories of tourism in SF is provided in the following Figure 2:

Figure 2 - An overview of tourism forms and categories related to SF



4. Towards a model to understand tourism in social farming as a form of social innovation

This section presents the results of the literature review, according to the three research questions proposed by the study to shed light on the socially innovative features of tourism in SF. In the end, a comprehensive framework is provided as a synthesis.

4.1. RQ1: Which societal challenges does tourism in social farming face?

Tourism in SF could respond to several societal needs, from the one for recreation to outmigration and depopulation; population ageing; social and work inclusion of the most fragile people; and a better urban-rural balance, which are strictly related to rural areas. The following sections will provide a detailed overview.

4.1.1. The need for recreation

Tourism in SF ensures an inclusive (Moriggi, 2020; Moriggi *et al.*, 2020) and safe access to nature (Chin & Pehin Dato Musa, 2021), whether this is a wild environment (Moriggi, 2020; Moriggi *et al.*, 2020) or managed by human activities (as in Lanfranchi & Giannetto, 2014). Indeed, farms are key assets for the development of rural tourism, by creating an offer that allows everyone to have a meaningful experience of the local products and rural culture but also creating a space for social integration of the most fragile groups (Lanfranchi *et al.*, 2015; Kmita-Dziasek, 2017). In this sense, the creation of targeted services for different needs allows for stimulating the accessibility of rural places (Calabrò *et al.*, 2022).

4.1.2. Outmigration and depopulation

Rural territories often suffer from depopulation and outmigration (Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014; Knapik, 2018). Therefore, creating leisure activities can help the development of the local communities' sense of belonging, thus reinforcing the rural identity and stability (Knapik, 2018; Lanfranchi *et al.*, 2015). In particular, tourism activities in SF become relevant in very marginal territories where people's livelihoods are primarily dependent on agriculture and animal breeding since they can help creating new employment opportunities and avoid migration flows (Forleo & Palmieri, 2019; Gramm *et*

al., 2019). This positively influences the familiar cohesion, by allowing women to redeem employment on-farm, as well as favoring the generational turnover (Ferrara *et al.*, 2023; Gramm *et al.*, 2019).

4.1.3. Population ageing

Population ageing is an issue affecting the global context. Knapik (2020) describes the condition of isolation faced by elders in rural areas as a consequence of the depopulation process. By employing agritourism activities and infrastructure, SF provides them with basic assistance services (Chiara *et al.*, 2019; Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014; Ferrara *et al.*, 2023; Knapik, 2020) and guarantees support to their family (Knapik, 2020). Similarly, Chen *et al.* (2021) describe the massive Taiwanese retreat migration from urban places to rural territories. In this case, the authors focus on the creation of a destination aimed at rural community-based prevention in primary care, through a semi-residential offer enhancing the social potential of agriculture.

4.1.4. Social work inclusion

Developing a tourism offer in SF can support the creation of job opportunities for the commonly socially excluded groups (Fazzi, 2011; Ferrara *et al.*, 2023; Moruzzo *et al.*, 2020; Tulla *et al.*, 2014). This is relevant in Mediterranean areas where working exclusion is among the most significant societal challenges faced by SF (Di Iacovo, 2020; Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014). Indeed, in these areas tourism can be easily combined with agriculture to provide job opportunities for different in-need people (Tulla *et al.*, 2014; Ferrara *et al.*, 2023), especially the ones with intellectual, physical disabilities or relational problems (Moruzzo *et al.*, 2020). In doing so, social farms not only attract tourism flows to rural areas (Tulla *et al.*, 2014) but, when organised in a systemic offer, they can produce positive impacts for inclusive economic growth (Ferrara *et al.*, 2023).

4.1.5. Urban-rural balance and environmental sustainability

Natural resources are the foundations of recreational activities in both rural and peri-urban areas (Moriggi, 2020). Here, the provision of nature-based leisure services not only fosters the urban-rural relationships but also promotes the maintenance of natural landscapes (Kmita-Dziasek, 2017; Nicolosi *et al.*, 2021), and limits the expansion of metropolitan centres to

the benefit of the surrounding areas. However, a coordinated plan should be designed to develop an array of basic services that enable the liveability of places otherwise vulnerable to uncontrolled displacement (Chen *et al.*, 2021). Table 3 provides an overview of the societal challenges that tourism in SF could help mitigate:

Table 3 - Contributions of tourism in SF to mitigating societal challenges

Societal challenges	The role of tourism in social farming
Need for recreation	a) provision of on-farm and off-farm activities b) inclusive and safe access to nature
Outmigration and depopulation	a) new employment opportunities b) familiar cohesion and community sense of belonging
Population ageing	a) targeted offer for senior assistance and support to their families b) Different use of agritourism resources
Social and working inclusion	a) employment opportunities for marginalised people b) inclusive economic rural growth
Rural-urban balance and environmental sustainability	a) improvement of the urban-rural relations, including urban surroundings b) natural landscapes maintenance c) coordinated rural-urban service plan

4.2. RQ2. In which terms does tourism in social farming enhance society's capacity to act?

Successful SF activities are developed from the collaboration of different societal actors (Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014; Knapik, 2020). This review identifies the roles of government, entrepreneurs, civil society, and universities in supporting tourism in SF:

4.2.1. Governmental capacity to act

Having access to nature is a right. In some countries, governments institutionalise the universal right to nature and support the development of tourism activities (Moriggi *et al.*, 2020). At the same time, a legislative framework is also essential for the implementation of SF projects (Knapik,

2020; Lanfranchi *et al.*, 2015). However, legislative attention is essential to combine the two activities and provide safety measures for nature-based tourism, especially when related to the involvement of farm visitors in agricultural works (Ferrara *et al.*, 2023). Without a legal framework, governmental support for local initiatives becomes of the utmost importance to encourage and certify social projects (Kmita-Dziasek, 2017) or to structure a plan for social activities (Chen *et al.*, 2021). Finally, to ensure the sustainability of the social activities in the long run, the literature suggests a stronger commitment from the public entities to finance recreational activities when addressed to the local communities (Gramm *et al.*, 2019; Knapik, 2020) as well as the training of personnel, together with the universities (Chin & Pehin Dato Musa, 2021).

4.2.2. Entrepreneurial capacity to act

Social entrepreneurs are essential for the social welfare growth (Lanfranchi & Giannetto, 2014; Lanfranchi *et al.*, 2015; Lanfranchi & Giannetto, 2014; Nicolosi *et al.*, 2021): in northern Europe (Moriggi *et al.*, 2020), they are driven by a strong commitment to guaranteeing universal access to nature. Instead, in Mediterranean countries social tourism is used to guarantee a diversified stream of revenues to the farm, to be reinvested in social projects (Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014; Ferrara *et al.*, 2023; Forleo & Palmieri, 2019), by engaging rural communities and addressing the need for social and working inclusion of disadvantaged people (Fazzi, 2011; Tulla *et al.*, 2014; Ferrara *et al.*, 2023). In both cases, farmers become the bearers of nature-based knowledge and values to be shared with visitors (Forleo & Palmieri, 2019; Moriggi *et al.*, 2020).

4.2.3. Civil society's capacity to act

Tourism in SF can foster agency in civil society, which is intended as the physical association of people. Two experiences are described in the literature: the first one is an educational initiative in Italy, called 'School on the Farm', born from a women's farmer association, to employ skills and knowledge to provide educational and cultural services on farm (Gramm *et al.*, 2019). The second one is about a Catalan social cooperative founded by young people who decided to move to a rural area to oppose a massive urban migration movement. They used rural tourism to allow the social integration of disadvantaged people, thus providing an "economically viable, socially just and environmentally sustainable" experience (Tulla *et al.*, 2014, p. 48).

4.2.4. University’s capacity to act

Universities play a key role in social and territorial development (Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014). In particular, their contribution to the development of tourism in SF could be associated with the action-research or participatory action-research activities (Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014). Indeed, through field studies, researchers can help to identify the social needs of communities and match them with the available resources (Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014; Knapik, 2020) to facilitate the design of individual social projects or entire systemic plans (Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014; Chen *et al.*, 2021; Knapik, 2018). Especially in the absence of regulations, universities can facilitate the multi-stakeholder dialogue, thus fostering inter-sectoral collaboration and becoming an accelerator of the SI (Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014).

Table 4 provides a comprehensive overview of the societal actors’ agency stimulated by tourism in SF:

Table 4 - An overview of the societal actors’ agency stimulated by tourism in SF. Author’s elaboration from the literature reviewed

Societal actor	Actors’ agency
Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) to protect the right to nature, and support nature-based experiences b) to support activities in social farming contexts c) to provide safety laws to access nature d) supporting the design of a systemic offer plan e) to support the training activities for personnel for tourism in SF f) to provide financial support for recreational activities addressed to local communities
Businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) to support economic farm profitability b) to ensure universal access to nature c) to create inclusive employment opportunities c) to share rural and nature-based knowledge and values
Civil society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) to counteract unsustainable social phenomena b) to enhance community’s skills and knowledge for education
Universities	<p>To support the design of a systemic offer plan through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research (combining needs with available resources) • multi-actor dialogue facilitation • workforce training

4.3. RQ3. Which social relations or collaborations does tourism in SF create?

Tourism in SF can create a socially innovative ecosystem, within by the relations among government, universities, businesses, and civil society. In Mediterranean areas, where SF projects experience limited governmental intervention (Di Iacovo, 2020; Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014), the relationships established among farmers, public administrations, citizens, and local producers (Fazzi, 2011; Ferrara *et al.*, 2023), are essential for social entrepreneurs to ensure the viability of their social projects (Ferrara *et al.*, 2023). In turn, the more relationships they establish with the territory, the more opportunities they will have to diversify their portfolio of activities (Nicolosi *et al.*, 2021; Tulla *et al.*, 2014).

In general, the organisation of tourism in SF requires collaboration among therapists, instructors, educators, consultants, and farmers (Kmita-Dziasek, 2017; Lanfranchi *et al.*, 2015). However, depending on the service offered by the farms, the literature suggests different types of relations: for services dedicated to the elderly, actors from the health and medical sector (Chen *et al.*, 2021), local associations, as well as nutritionists and agronomists for a specific culinary offer are needed (Chiara *et al.*, 2019). When the tourism service is organised in the context of educational farms, collaboration may integrate schools, and associations of local farmers, to enable the development of farm visits for children (Forleo & Palmieri, 2019; Gramm *et al.*, 2019). Forleo and Palmieri (2019) also identify the need to extend collaborations to accommodation businesses and other food industries to develop tourism offers for the general public. Networking with transport agencies is generally suggested (Chen *et al.*, 2021; Knapik, 2020; Moriggi *et al.*, 2020), together with engaging with tourism, cultural and natural sites (Forleo & Palmieri, 2019; Tulla *et al.*, 2014). Table 5 provides an overview of the roles and relations among different societal actors fostered by tourism in SF:

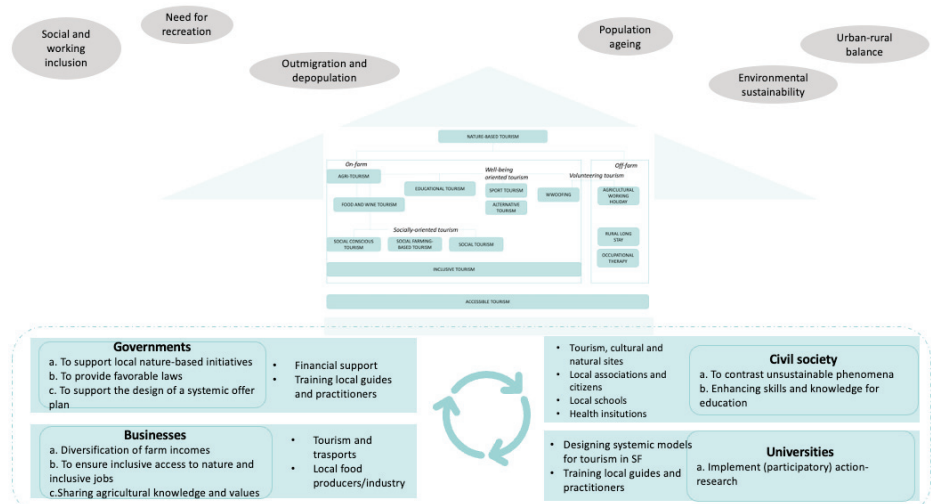
Table 5 - Relations fostered by tourism in social farming. Author's elaboration on the literature reviewed

Businesses	Civil society and other institutions	Government	Universities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism and transports • Local food producers and industries • Agritourism and accommodation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism, cultural and natural sites • Local associations and citizens • Local schools • Health institutions/ workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial support to bottom-up initiatives • Training local guides and practitioners • Designing systemic models for tourism in SF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designing systemic models for tourism in SF • Training local guides and practitioners

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The following Figure 3 presents a comprehensive framework to understand tourism in SF as a form of SI. Based on the literature reviewed, the upper part of the figure shows the societal challenges mitigated by tourism in SF. In the lower part of the figure, the actors involved in this process are presented in relation to the motivations for intervention, the roles assumed, and their capacity to generate relations within the territory.

Figure 3 - A comprehensive framework to understand tourism in social farming as a form of social innovation. Authors' elaboration based on the literature reviewed



Conclusions

There is an increasing need to ensure inclusive rural development (European Commission, 2021). In this context, where tourism is known to have a key role in promoting economic growth, the current debate about making it a sustainable activity advocates the need for socially innovative practices which could contribute to enhancing community participation and social inclusion (Booyens, 2022). The foundations of this study lie in the well-established field of SF as a form of SI in rural areas (Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014). Indeed, the most recent studies on the topic emphasise the potential of tourism activities developed in this context to foster accessible services in rural areas (Calabrò *et al.*, 2022) and, more generally, their inclusive economic development (Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2021; Ferrara *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, the present study was aimed at systematising the scientific literature on the topic and

analysing the socially innovative nature of the phenomenon, by answering three specific questions: What social challenges does tourism in SF respond to? In which terms does it enhance social actors' agency? Which social relations or collaborations does it create? The result, which combines perspectives on the recreational aspects of the activities with those related to the organisation of a tourism offer in non-urbanised areas, highlights the role of agriculture as a place of socially relevant value for our societies.

The present study has, first and foremost, a theoretical contribution as it frames tourism in SF as a form of SI, by highlighting the reasons, interventions, and collaborations that this can generate for the specific purpose, thus extending the aims previously explored in the field (see Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014). At the same time, the study also has some practical contributions since it provides key elements for the construction of a recreational offer in the context of SF for those territories where tourism is considered an asset for socio-economic development.

However, the literature considered in this study is a contribution from different regions of the world. Although this helped to provide a broad overview of the variables characterising the phenomenon, it does not allow for generalisation of the results. Therefore, further research directions are suggested for the future: the first lies in the application of the evidence-informed knowledge generated by this review (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003), in territories where tourism can be an asset. The author is aware of the fruitful grey literature emerging on the topic, also due to the proliferation of related funded projects. Although this was not considered among the criteria of this review, grey literature could be a source of additional information for further cases to be analysed in the future. Furthermore, since leisure studies have extensively analysed the topic, a further line of investigation concerns the organisation of tourism activities as part of a rural destination, by highlighting their managerial aspects, as well as the impacts generated on both the supply and the demand side.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Annex A - Forms and aims of tourism associated to SF. Data collected from the literature reviewed

Forms tourism in SF	Definition	Source
Nature-based tourism	Recreational activities aiming to promote well-being for all.	(Moriggi, 2020)
Accessible tourism	Tourism and hospitality services aimed to overcome social, cultural, gender and disability barriers	(Calabrò <i>et al.</i> , 2022)
Inclusive tourism	Activities for the inclusion of the most marginalized groups, both as target of the tourism offer, and tourism workforce	(Ferrara <i>et al.</i> , 2023)
Agri-tourism	Multifunctionality of farm and agriculture for the creation of social and working services	(Chiara <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Di Iacovo <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Moruzzo <i>et al.</i> 2020; Knapik, 2020; Chin <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Nicolosi <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2021)
Food and wine-based tourism	Activities enhancing farm products and addressed to the general visitors, while providing farm economic diversification	(Lanfranchi & Giannetto, 2014)
Educational tourism	Activities based on disseminating the rural values and mainly addressed to children, young people, and families	(Forleo & Palmieri, 2019; Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2021)
Sport tourism	Activities aiming at encouraging a healthy lifestyle in a rural scenario	(Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2021)
Alternative rural tourism	Activities based on the needs of visitors, with the aim of encouraging a healthy diet and lifestyle	(Filomena <i>et al.</i> , 2019)
WWOOFing	Volunteering tourism directed to visitors seeking knowledge about the organic farming and the rural world	(Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2021)
Agricultural working holidays	Volunteering tourism for seniors, aiming at seeking spiritual growth and fulfilment	(Chen <i>et al.</i> , 2021)
Socially conscious agritourism	Recreational activities aimed at improving the quality of life of vulnerable people	(Tulla <i>et al.</i> , 2014)

Annex A - continued

Forms tourism in SF	Definition	Source
Social farming-based tourism	Activities intersecting health and education sectors, and the labour market, aiming at maximizing nature's benefits to human being	(Kmita-Dziasek, 2017)
Social tourism	Activities for the social inclusion of the most marginalized people, created from the wellness services and rural well-being vocation of farms	(Nicolosi <i>et al.</i> , 2021)
Rural long-stay tourism	Attracting senior city residents to rural areas, by offering nature-based services	(Chen <i>et al.</i> , 2021)
Occupational therapy	Nature-based tourism for resident senior, including gardening, eco-therapy, and green exercise	(Chen <i>et al.</i> , 2021)

Annex B - Thematic data analysis (adapted from Levitt, 2018; Gibbs, 2007; Saldaña, 2013)

RQ	Theme	Sub-theme	Code	Source of the information
		Space for recreation	← On-farm activities	(Lanfranchi <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Lanfranchi & Giannetto, 2014)
	Need for recreation	←	Off-farm activities	(Moriggi, 2020; Moriggi <i>et al.</i> , 2020)
		←	Safe access to nature	(Chin & Pehin Dato Musa, 2021)
		←	Inclusive access to nature	(Moriggi, 2020; Moriggi <i>et al.</i> , 2020)
		←	Rural accessibility	(Calabrò <i>et al.</i> , 2022)
			Inclusive tourism offers	(Ferrara <i>et al.</i> , 2023; Lanfranchi <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Kmita-Dziasek, 2017)
			Need for basic services in rural areas	(Di Iacovo <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Knapik, 2020)
	Outmigration and depopulation	←	Community sense of belonging	(Knapik, 2018; Lanfranchi <i>et al.</i> , 2015)
		←	New on-farm work opportunities	(Forleo & Palmieri, 2019)
		←	Opportunities for women	(Gramm <i>et al.</i> , 2019)
		←	Generational turnover	(Ferrara <i>et al.</i> , 2023; Gramm <i>et al.</i> , 2019)
		←	Need for rural activities in retirement	(Chen <i>et al.</i> , 2021)
	Population ageing	←	Condition of isolation in rural areas	(Di Iacovo <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Knapik, 2020)
		β	Employment of agritourism resources	(Chiara <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Di Iacovo <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Ferrara <i>et al.</i> , 2023; Knapik, 2020)
		←	Family support	(Knapik, 2020)
		←	Need for work inclusion	(Fazzi, 2011; Tulla <i>et al.</i> , 2014)
	Social-working inclusion	←	Categories involved in social-working inclusion	(Fazzi, 2011; Moruzzo <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Tulla <i>et al.</i> , 2014)
		←	Networking as a means for inclusive economic rural growth	Ferrara <i>et al.</i> , 2023; Tulla <i>et al.</i> , 2014

Annex B - continued

RQ	Theme	Sub-theme	Code	Source of the information	
RQ2	Urban-rural balance and environmental sustainability	Design of a coordinated service plan	← Maintenance of natural landscapes	(Chen <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	
			← Recreation in urban surroundings	(Kmita-Dziasek, 2017; Nicolosi <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	
			← Urban-rural relations	(Moriggi, 2020)	
		Support the design of systemic offer plan	β Fostering urban movements towards rural areas	(Kmita-Dziasek, 2017)	
			← Recognition and support of social projects	(Chen <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	
			← Institutionalisation of the universal right to the nature	(Kmita-Dziasek, 2017)	
		Governmental capacity to act	Provision of legislative frameworks	← Support to initiatives in rural territories	(Moriggi, 2020)
				← Legislative framework for SF projects	(Knapik, 2020; Lanfranchi <i>et al.</i> , 2015)
			Additional interventions needed	← Legislative framework to allow tourism activities in SF	(Ferrara <i>et al.</i> , 2023)
				← Financial support of activities for local communities	(Gramm <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Knapik, 2020)
University capacity to act	(Participatory) action-research	← Personnel training	(Chin & Pehin Dato Musa, 2021) (Gramm <i>et al.</i> , 2019)		
		← Preliminary research (needs and resources)	(Chen <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Di Iacovo <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Knapik, 2020)		
		← Multi-actor facilitation	(Di Iacovo <i>et al.</i> , 2014)		
		← Support the design of a systemic offer plan	(Chen <i>et al.</i> , 2021)(Di Iacovo <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Knapik, 2018)		

Annex B - continued

RQ	Theme	Sub-theme	Code	Source of the information
		← Support the social welfare growth		(Lanfranchi <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Lanfranchi & Giannetto, 2014; Nicolosi <i>et al.</i> , 2021)
	Entrepreneurial capacity to act	← Ensure universal access to nature		(Moriggi <i>et al.</i> , 2020)
		← Inclusive work opportunity provision		(Ferrara <i>et al.</i> , 2023; Fazzi, 2011; Tulla <i>et al.</i> , 2014)
		Ensuring inclusive tourism (access and workforce)		(Di Iacovo <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Ferrara <i>et al.</i> , 2023; Forleo & Palmieri, 2019)
		← Economic profitability of farms		(Forleo & Palmieri, 2019)
		← Sharing knowledge		(Forleo & Palmieri, 2019; Moriggi, 2020)
	Civil society capacity to act	← Enhance community's skills and knowledge for educational purposes		(Gramm <i>et al.</i> , 2019)
		← Counteract unsustainable movements		(Tulla <i>et al.</i> , 2014)
	β	Social innovative ecosystem (government, universities, business, and civil society)		(Di Iacovo <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Fazzi, 2011; Kmita-Dziasek, 2017; Lanfranchi <i>et al.</i> , 2015)
		← Greater networks, increased activity portfolio		(Nicolosi <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Tulla <i>et al.</i> , 2014)
		← Health and medical sector		(Chen <i>et al.</i> , 2021)
	Services targeting seniors	← Nutritionists and similar		(Chen <i>et al.</i> , 2021; (Chiara <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Knapik, 2020)
		← Transport agencies		(Chen <i>et al.</i> , 2021; (Knapik, 2020; Moriggi, 2020)
RQ3		Actors/sectors to involve in meaningful collaboration		(Chiara <i>et al.</i> , 2019)
	Service targeting children	← Schools and farmers' associations		(Forleo & Palmieri, 2019)
		← Accommodation businesses and food industries		(Gramm <i>et al.</i> , 2019)
	General	← Cultural and environmental bodies		(Forleo & Palmieri, 2019 (Tulla <i>et al.</i> , 2014))

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